

Refugee Hospitality Encounters in Northern Portugal: “Cultural Orientations” and “Contextual Protection”

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

The article discusses the legal and institutional framework of refugee hospitality in Portugal. This sets the context for an analysis of how hospitality encounters take place in northern towns between relocated and spontaneous asylum seekers, refugees, voluntary hosting institutions, public services and volunteers. The aim is to enquire into the conflicting expectations, morals and values and into how they are managed and negotiated in practice. Through focusing on the “moral subjectivities” of individuals, the data elucidates the tensions that arise between charity-based and rights-based approaches, how misunderstandings arise and are avoided through engaging in “contextual protection” and how linear transitions from hospitality to hostility cannot be presumed.

Key words: Asylum-seekers, Civil Society, Humanitarianism, International Protection, Morality, Portugal, Rights.

Introduction

What is hospitality? The answer is not as straightforward as the phrase “Refugees Welcome” implies, displayed on banners across European cities by local populations asserting our common humanity in defiance of national boundaries in the wake of the borders and migration crisis of 2015. Derrida (2000) examines the internal contradiction between the law of unconditional “absolute hospitality” and the political and legal limitations imposed by the laws of the state. He argues that it is due to the irresolvable nature of this tension between the ethics of unconditional openness to the Other and the protectionism of sovereign closure to foreigners that hospitality may easily turn into hostility. Pitt-Rivers (2012 [1977]) argues that the possibility of hostility is always present in the host – guest relationship since a guest cannot claim rights. It is this tension between charity and rights, between voluntary commitments and legally binding obligations that lies at the very heart of refugee hospitality (Khosravi 2010) which I shall explore in the light of case material from northern Portugal. I shall elucidate the ways in which tensions and conflicting expectations about hospitality encounters arise and are negotiated in practice.

The case material illustrates how the dynamics of refugee hospitality are more complex and nuanced than that of a linear transition from hospitality to hostility as implied in the work of Derrida (2000). This is not to argue that sentiments of hostility were not to be found but rather, as Rozakou (2016:186) argues, in relation to her analysis of socialities of solidarity in Greece, “Human relations are never devoid of ambiguities and contradictions and the people involved are, most of the time, not only aware of them but also self-reflexive, even before the anthropologist appears on the scene”.

One of the dangers of employing “hospitality” as an analytical concept is that these ambiguities and contradictions may be overlooked. This also raises the question of whether the concept of hospitality serves as an analytical tool. Pitt-Rivers (2012 [1977]) argues for the need to distinguish between the law of hospitality in the abstract and the specific codes of hospitality in different cultures. Candea (2012) warns against using the concept to frame and explain the actions of individuals due to its scale-free abstraction and to the consequent unquestioned scale-shifts that are produced through comparisons that equate the microcosm with the macrocosm. The need to distinguish between different layers of analysis, such as that of institutions and their employees, will become evident in the case material below in which the employee of a hosting institution was criticized by her colleagues for her apparent excessive “hospitality”. Seen from this perspective, hospitality should be approached as “an object of contention, concern and debate” (Candea, 2012:S46). In other words, the meaning of

hospitality cannot be fixed and taken for granted as an unambiguous measure against which to examine the virtues and shortcomings of hosts – be they societies, cultures, institutions or individuals. So I shall depart from Derrida's notion of "absolute hospitality" to focus on the "languages of hospitality" (Frieze 2004). The "moral subjectivities" (Fassin 2015) of my informants - conscious acts that result from reflections on a dilemma or from ordinary practices that have moral content - consequently constitute a key focus of this article.

Fassin (2012, 2015) situates present-day encounters of refugee hospitality within a wider historical analysis of how moral sentiments have become generalized as a frame of reference in contemporary societies, leading to the recognition of social suffering instead of inequality, to the mobilization of compassion and humanitarianism instead of justice and rights. In fieldwork conducted in a refugee camp in Greece, Rozakou (2012) notes how the official state discourse of the worthy guest, reproduced by volunteers in the camp, depoliticized asylum seekers, limiting their agency, by representing them as apolitical beings in need who should comply with the rules of hospitality (Rozakou 2012).

Asylum seekers are commonly referred to as "refugees" before they have acquired rights. For the layperson the legal distinction between asylum seeker and refugee may not be significant. Yet, this distinction causes confusion and distress when – due to the restrictive criteria of the 1951 Geneva Convention – asylum seekers are denied refugee status and given subsidiary or humanitarian protection instead, with shorter residence permits subject to review. The formal denial of this status is to strip them of their political identity (Jassouma 2017). Whatever kind of international protection individuals receive from host states, "refugee" is the only word available in everyday vocabulary to refer to them and so this may exacerbate the sense of injustice experienced when beneficiaries of different regimes of international protection compare the rights they have been granted. On the other hand, to expose the political identity of an individual as a refugee in public may also be experienced, in certain social contexts, as the failure to provide protection.

The term "protection gaps" has been used in the literature to refer to the inadequacies in the protection offered to refugees with respect to failings in the legislation or implementation of international refugee law (Turk and Dowd 2016). I have coined the term "contextual protection" in order to make sense of specific practices of refugee hospitality at the micro level, the nuances of which are insufficiently captured by the notion of "cultural mediation". I was inspired in Herzfeld's (1997:3) notion of "cultural intimacy" which, implying the need to hide cultural traits from the public eye, is defined as "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality". The idea of the need to protect "cultural insiders" is important here; however, the concept of cultural identity has become problematic. To claim that refugee hospitality encounters are intercultural encounters is not to argue that the self-identity of refugees and hosts is constituted by reference to unitary, consistent and bounded cultures interacting with each other. Binsbergen (2003:461) claims that "human beings at any one moment in time have...a plurality of intersecting 'cultural orientations' co-existing simultaneously between which there is often no systematic connection".

Let us consider his argument further. Binsbergen describes the very different conceptions of purity that he invokes in diverse social settings and how they activate totally different social roles and identities. His tenderness and psychological immunity to pollution when, as a father he changes his children's nappies, for example, invokes a different approach to purity than when, entertaining an African professor in an expensive restaurant, he reacts

with histrionic anger at finding a hair in the soup. This contrasts again with his stoical resignation to cockroaches and rotten meat during fieldwork in famine affected areas in Africa. In other words, it was the social setting that activated his differential responses.

In the context of forced mobility, refugees and their hosts may experience a sense of incongruence between the social setting and the response it evokes. This is why mediators play an important role in recognizing that an individual's response in a given social interaction is the expression of a cultural orientation from another context, helping to diminish the sense of incongruence felt by its apparent social inappropriateness. The Portuguese case illustrates how social actors exercised "contextual protection" which involved shielding individuals from negative value judgments, intrusive enquiry or public exposure of personal information, by withholding information or editing verbal translations. Hosts may also fail to provide "contextual protection" by unwittingly sharing personal information, out of the eagerness to help refugees or to talk about them in awareness raising events. This was evident during my involvement as a voluntary member of the inter-institutional "migrant team" in my home town, responsible for the promotion of the local council's integration plan¹ for migrants. A political refugee expressed anger for having been publically identified as a refugee during a social event.

My role as a volunteer team member has been to participate in social activities, providing translation whenever possible (between English, Portuguese and French). I have not yet found the space to develop my potential role as a researcher for actively promoting reflexive dialogue. This is partly due to the time constraints of my interlocutors, but also, to my situation as an unemployed researcher engaging in fieldwork during periods between contracts and postdoctoral grants and therefore not wishing to commit myself more fully, without the guarantee of being able to continue the research. I mention this because my situation is indicative of how the effects of the economic recession that began in Portugal in 2010 in the wake of the 2007-8 global financial crisis, with increases in work precarity and unemployment has spread throughout Portuguese society (Estanque 2017) and, as shall become evident below, of how the sense of uncertainty with regard to employment prospects experienced by refugees in Portugal was shared by some members of the local population.

The article draws on the preliminary findings of ongoing research initiated in April 2016 that focuses on the encounters between refugees, asylum seekers and local host institutions across three towns in northern Portugal. The names of the towns, institutions and individuals have all been codified to safeguard anonymity.

I obtained authorization to carry out research on the work of two institutions which began to host Syrian asylum seekers in my home town in the autumn of 2016 through the European relocation program (discussed below). Access to two hosting institutions and to the refugees in the other two towns was mediated via a small group of Syrian university students, of the Global Platform for Syrian Students – an initiative launched by the former President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio. They were serving as voluntary cultural and linguistic mediators for the Syrian refugees who had arrived through the European relocation program, in response to the request of host institutions in search of Arabic translators.

Fieldwork consisted of participation in public awareness raising events and meetings, private meetings between hosting institutions and the Syrian students; interviews with three host institutions and eleven individuals involved in refugee hospitality as well as visiting five refugee families and five spontaneous asylum seekers accompanying some of them to state and local bureaucracies. Apart from two formal interviews, most of the data with regard to the refugees' lives was gathered through the informal conversations during participant

observation (in some cases with the aid of translation either from the Syrian students or google translate).

Asylum Seeking and Hospitality in Portugal: Setting the Scene

In comparison with other European countries which have higher development indicators, the number of asylum applications received in Portugal has always been extremely low. In 2008, for example, Portugal received 160 asylum applications compared to 4,515 in Spain, 26, 845 in Germany and 41,840 in France. Whilst by 2016 the number of applicants had increased more than nine fold in Portugal, the total amount of 1460 was still numerically insignificant compared to other European countries such as Germany which received a total of 745,155 in 2016 (Eurostat 2017).

Before 2015 when more than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe (UNHCR 2017) refugee hospitality was consequently a relatively distant and incipient issue for contemporary Portuguese society, experienced vicariously and stereotypically through the social media. Yet, the passing of the 1998 asylum law² nearly twenty years ago, testifies to the forward thinking of Portuguese legislation since it already provided international protection that promoted local integration before refugee status was granted. Portuguese law stipulates that once the asylum application has been admitted for examination, applicants are issued with a temporary residence permit – currently renewable every six months³ until a final decision has been made. Contrary to the practices of other European countries, such as those of Holland (Van Heelsum 2017), the UK (Mayblin 2016) and of Ireland (Kinlen 2014) the Portuguese permit grants asylum seekers the same rights as Portuguese citizens to employment, education, social security and national health services. However, in practice there are also shortcomings in the implementation of the law. Based on fieldwork in Lisbon, Santinho (2013) testifies to the difficulties faced by refugees in finding work and to their dissatisfaction with living standards in Portugal. The subsidies they received were not enough to live on and there was a lack of linguistic and cultural mediation services.

The arrival of more than half a million residents from the African colonies - in the wake of Portugal's 25 April revolution in 1974 which precipitated their decolonization – constitutes a significant historical antecedent to Portuguese refugee hospitality. Their experience was, in some aspects, similar to that of refugees because people had to leave at very short notice, with barely any belongings in need of housing and jobs with the expectation that their ties to Portuguese kin would facilitate integration. Yet, as Lubkemann's (2002) study reveals, they were evaluated within the parameters of a local moral economy of migration that required "material manifestations of their concern for, connection with, and care for relatives who remained in Portugal and for their home communities" (2002:193). Seen as failing to conform to this idealized emigrant script, these decolonization immigrants - nearly 40 per cent of which had been born in Africa and had never travelled to Portugal - were referred to as "returnees" (*retornados*). This official term took on a stigmatizing connotation to distinguish them from emigrants from Europe or America, who maintained closer material and affective ties with Portugal. It was used to suggest essentialized ethnic difference to depict not only those of African but also those of European descent as culturally inferior (Marques 2016, Lubkemann 2002). *Retornados* were thus seen in the popular migration discourse as unworthy of assistance as the following quotation from a retired civil servant in Lubkemann's (2002:200) study exemplifies. "When the *retornados* arrived it created a nightmare. In the end they abused the Portuguese way of hospitality because they did not act with respect, but like this was their land in Africa". David's (2015) study on the experiences of *retornados* provides

further context for this comment by illustrating how the *retornados*’ “cultural orientations” (Binsbergen 2003), acquired in Africa, may have been deemed socially inappropriate.

The *retornados* were more liberal and open-minded, something which reflected in the way they dressed: colourful and less conservative clothing. All my interviewees mentioned these different traits, stressing that the white settlers were more open and relaxed, a characteristic they adopted from the African populations. As Mr. Almeida explained, black people have a *joie de vivre* that became ingrained in the white population. This suggests that *retornados* created a specific identity, differentiating them from the Portuguese.

The supposed social inappropriateness of wearing the hijab, expressed by teachers, according to the mother of a Syrian pupil in my home town, illustrates that if modern day Portuguese society has become more liberal, the power of mainstream cultural orientations still holds sway.

During the decolonization period, Portugal was also facing economic recession. According to David’s interviewees, the financial help they received was seen as unjust and there were also fears that the *retornados* would steal people’s jobs (David 2015). Yet, their comparatively higher levels of education and qualification⁴, as well as their professional, entrepreneurial experience, enabled the *retornados* to develop their own small businesses and to exercise skilled professions so that with the passage of time, material success enabled them to (re)insert themselves into their local communities. By the 1990s the term *retornado* was no longer a publically recognized ethnic minority in Portugal. However, those whose phenotype differentiated them from the “white” majority, continued to experience discrimination (David 2015; Lubkemann 2002).

Another factor that facilitated integration for the majority of the *retornados* was their dispersion throughout the country (Oliveira 2008). This strategy was deliberately adopted by the Portuguese government when decades later, it pledged to receive refugees. Similar concerns that they were stealing jobs emerged during the fieldwork.

The Relocation Program

In September 2015, Portugal pledged to receive a total of 4574 resettled refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2017 within the ambit of the European Agenda on Migration (EAM) and its relocation program (SEF 2015:48). Rather than hosting individuals in state run centres, the government adopted a decentralized community-based approach. The aim was to mobilize consortiums of local authorities and of local institutions that would work together to meet people’s needs in terms of providing independent accommodation and access to employment, health, education, Portuguese language acquisition and vocational training.

Third sector provision of social services has a long history in Portugal. Dating back to the sixth century, with the creation of the charity *Misericórdias*, it developed throughout the nineteenth century to respond to the needs of the socially vulnerable, marginalized sectors of the population. The transition to democracy in 1974 resulted in a flourishing of civil society organizations, some of which signed protocols with the state to receive financial support for their services, working within a framework of shared social responsibility (Coutinho 2001). The number of private institutions of social solidarity in Portugal consequently rose from 1800 in 1986 (Joaquim 2015:17) to 5123 in 2017⁵.

It is within this broader context of cooperation between state and civil society that in 2015, the government appealed to the public to welcome refugees. A key player was the NGO – the Institute of Father António Vieira (IPAV) which launched the Refugee Support Platform

(PAR) in Lisbon in early September 2015 (Sanches 2015). PAR created an on-line site where organizations could register to apply to host refugee families (<http://www.refugiados.pt>). On the home page of the site, a slide show of photographs of refugees forms a back drop to the verses of a famous social protest poem - “the Peace Cantata” - by the Camões literature prize winner (1999), Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (1919-2004): “We see, we hear we read. We cannot ignore⁶”. The poem, written for a vigil held in a Lisbon church on New Year’s Eve in 1968 to protest against Portuguese colonialism was turned into a song and recorded by Francisco Fanhais in 1970. It became one of the most frequently sung protest songs up until the end of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974. The posting of these verses on the PAR site served to appeal to people’s emotions by tapping into the collective consciousness of Portugal’s history of resistance to the injustice, violence and suffering of dictatorship and colonial rule. By July 2016 around 400 civil society and private organizations across the country had registered with PAR to host refugees⁷. One of these was a private psychology and training centre (PTC) that operated in my home town. The director of PTC was moved to mobilize a group of friends to host a family by a photograph she saw on social media of a man in a boat wearing a life jacket, his face contorted with emotion. A local parish in my home town also registered with PAR. In the words of the local priest: “I was inspired by Pope Francisco who said that every parish should be open to receiving refugees”.

Families hosted through PAR signed contracts for two years, whereas families hosted through other organizations such as the Red Cross, were only given eighteen months’ contracts. The hosting institutions received six thousand Euros through the relocation program for each person and out of these funds, adults were entitled to one hundred and fifty Euros a month and seventy-five Euros were given for each child. A family of four, for example, would thus receive below the minimum wage⁸; however, the families did not have to pay rent since the accommodation was provided for free and bills and other needs were paid for out of the funds. At the end of their contracts, the hosting institutions were no longer legally obliged to support the families. This created anxiety amidst the refugees. All of the hosted families I contacted expressed a general sense of insecurity with regard to their future. What if they had not found a job? How would they pay for the water and electricity bills? Would they be able to stay in the accommodation provided? If so, would they have to pay rent?

The answer varied from institution to institution since it depended upon who provided the accommodation. The only assurance that the hosting institutions could give was that if they were still unemployed at the end of their contracts, refugees would be entitled to the same state funds that spontaneous asylum seekers received from their institutional interlocutor - the Institute of Social Security (ISS) – which as shall become evident below, offered a less personalized service.

Despite the inter-ministerial, de-centralized approach adopted towards refugee hospitality, not all state services were sufficiently prepared to accommodate the needs of refugees. The Institute for Employment and Professional Training for example, responsible for assisting refugees in their search for employment, was according to the director of PCT, too bureaucratic and not even able to respond to the employment needs of the local population. She claimed it was especially insensitive to the handicapped: a social group she worked with. “The first thing they ask for is a diploma – and when they say they don’t have them, then they cannot help”.

Lack of knowledge of the Portuguese language constituted a further impediment to finding work. I accompanied Bassel - a Syrian man hosted through the relocation programme, who had worked in a clothes factory for fifteen years in Aleppo - to various factories in search

of work but he was turned away because he only spoke Kurdish and Arabic. Portuguese language classes were provided, but mostly by regular teachers with no or little experience or training in teaching Portuguese as a foreign language, especially to Arabic speakers who also needed to learn the alphabet, so progress was slow. Extra classes were given in my home town by retired volunteers.

By 24 July 2017 with six months left of the official timeline, Portugal had only received 1400 asylum seekers (European Commission 2017: 2) – just over a third of the numbers pledged. The low numbers of arrivals was accompanied by a steady increase in the statistics reported in the local media of secondary movement. The majority left Portugal secretly; their residence permits were not valid for travel since, according to the Dublin Agreement, they were not entitled to international protection outside of Portugal and they feared that they may be impeded from leaving if they informed their host institutions. In September 2017 the Expresso newspaper (Moleiro 2017) reported that more than half of the asylum seekers relocated to Portugal had left and that 43% of those had been identified and informed of their obligatory return. The article invokes the memory of the *retornados* by opening with the term *retomados* (the retaken) and making a comparison with the experiences of involuntary “return” to Portugal from Africa over 40 years ago. This flippant play on words undermines any serious recognition of the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers (as well as by the decolonization immigrants) opening ground for stigmatized labelling and moralizations regarding ingratitude and abuse of hospitality.

Solidarity and Contextual Protection

The biopolitical power relations of humanitarian assistance in which migrants and refugees are managed, regulated and depoliticized have been discussed in the literature (Ticktin 2011, Fassin 2012, 2015) which also draws attention to the importance of avoiding excessively systematic interpretations of the workings of governmentality by focusing on the discretionary power (Lipsky 1980) that low level agents of public administration are able to exercise in their interactions with citizens. Fassin (2015) examines the intersection between policies and practices by focusing on the tensions within the public sphere that arise when opposing values come into conflict over given social issues.

One such example occurred in a meeting with hosting institutions in which the Syrian students reported that the refugees believed their salaries were low because the state wanted to force their wives to work. An interlocutor for refugees from ISS responded that if the wife refuses to work, her social payment is cut and she is not allowed to reapply for two years. However, she also distanced herself from this policy by commenting that she did not necessarily agree. Her comment provides a window into how the “moral subjectivities” (Fassin 2015) of state employees may enter into conflict with state policy.

If the law was unable to accommodate the Syrians’ alternative “cultural orientations” (van Binserbergen 2003) regarding working wives, everyday bureaucratic encounters were also governed by particular expectations of how to behave. The ISS interlocutor for refugees in my home town, for example, claimed that her colleagues were very rigid, criticizing refugees for turning up, without booking appointments, and expecting to be attended. Two spontaneous asylum seekers spoke of the long times they were made to wait when they went to the ISS and it was often to complain about delays in payments. On one such occasion, Mohnid from Pakistan, asked an official where he was supposed to eat if he did not receive his money, reporting with indignation how he was told to go and eat in the social canteen.

Comparing his situation to the Syrian families of the relocation programme, Mohnid noted “If they get a job, they are still entitled to their benefits and their rent and bills are paid for. We have only 263 Euros a month out of which we must pay everything”.

There were also wide discrepancies between the different services and benefits provided to refugees hosted through the relocation programme, since besides PAR, other civil society consortiums had responded to the government’s appeal. This constituted a source of tension as refugees compared their situations through the use of social media sites and applications. Marwa, one of the Syrian students, claimed that the contents of the contracts were not sufficiently explained. People needed more help to understand what was in the contract in terms of time scale, obligations and rights. She claimed they needed to understand the difference between charity and rights; to be made aware of what their basic rights were and to understand that anything else they received was extra and not obligatory – thanks to the good will of the organization - and it was for this reason that they should not compare. Yet, the distinction between basic rights and charitable “extras” is difficult to make in practice because the two are often intertwined in local understandings of hospitality. Complaining about the way he was treated in the local immigration services, for example, Mohnid stated “If foreigners come to your country they are guests – in my country they are treated very kindly and you give them what you have”. A guest, according to Pitt-Rivers (2012[1977]) cannot claim rights. And yet, if the law of hospitality is broken has not a guest’s right to hospitality been denied?

PTC not only organized a welcome lunch when the family arrived but, months later, also a surprise birthday lunch in a restaurant for the mother of the family. This gesture of hospitality, interpreted in the light of Marwa’s comments discussed above, clearly went beyond the organization’s obligations. It testifies to the emotional engagement (Malkki 2015) of their hosts. Bassel’s family, hosted by a different charity which did not organize these kinds of events for them, was also invited and inevitably made comparisons. Bassel also compared his experiences with those of friends hosted in other Portuguese towns and found his institution wanting. Bassel felt that he had been left to fend for himself and found this particularly difficult in encounters with the local bureaucracy since he did not speak Portuguese. He discovered his right to claim child benefit, for example, through talking to Syrians hosted in other towns.

Raising awareness and encouraging civil society to get involved in the relocation program constituted a means of bridging some of the gaps in service provision, appealing to people’s sense of solidarity. Bassel, for example, was given a six month part-time employment contract for cleaning, following a chance encounter spontaneously mediated by me with the director of a local organization who admitted that she did not really need more cleaners, but it was her duty to help out. She also employed his wife and renewed both their contracts.

Relevant here is the point made by Theodossopoulos that “the de-politicising effect of humanitarianism does not preclude the politically empowering potential of humanitarian solidarity” (2016:181) which, as Rozakou (2016:190) argues, seeks to redress the imbalance of the one-way offers of “the extravagant generosity of hospitality”. The desire to reciprocate was evident in the case of Bassel and his family, who, following the deadly fires that affected central Portugal in the summer of 2017, killing over sixty people and destroying hundreds of properties and businesses, donated rice, beans, pasta, canned food and clothes to a local charity to help the fire victims.

Another example of solidarity was the case of António, a Portuguese citizen, who offered his flat to the family hosted by PTC and upon consultation, had decided that he would let the family stay on at the end of the contract for a symbolic rent of fifty Euros. He explained in an interview that it was important for the family to start to take financial responsibility. At the same time, however, he recognized that they needed a transition period to support them, claiming that he did not want to charge the market price like creditors at the end of financial rescue plans that immediately serve countries with their debt ratings.

António never got to meet the family. He had not felt the need to meet them personally because he was not interested in the individual case. Moreover, his justification for this constitutes an example of “contextual protection”: he felt it inappropriate to meet them immediately at the welcoming lunch as the owner of the flat because he wanted to avoid any sense of vassalage; they should feel at ease. No-body had rented the flat for six months and so he felt it was wrong not to offer it. António’s motivations reveal not only moral obligation but also a broader ethical life project of solidarity. He had been involved in voluntary work and offered this as an implicit justification. “Some people think that we have to preserve the comfortable lives that we have but it is a false comfort because we can’t do this whilst closing our eyes to others. They affect us even if we try to ignore them”. Syria was the cradle of civilization, he told me, and any civilization could suffer the same fate. Portuguese culture was highly influenced by Christianity, the roots of which were to be found in the Middle East. “We share the same heritage. Think of Saint Paul’s conversion; it took place on the road to Damascus. He stopped persecuting Christians ... Of course I am not interested what their religion is now”. António also referred to ancestry DNA tests as another example of our common humanity.

Bassel’s hosting institution kept him waiting a long time before informing whether he would be able to stay on in the flat, at less than the market price, at the end of their contract. This was a source of tension because Bassel had a large family. He was in constant contact with an English speaking Syrian who had moved on from Portugal to Germany, often helping to translate for me through WhatsApp. On one of these occasions, his friend became very angry, when Bassel expressed the hope that he would be allowed to stay in the flat for free at the end of the contract, telling him he should give up hope because the institution had showed no signs of wanting to help him. He based this opinion on Bassel’s complaints regarding, for example, maintenance issues in the flat which continued unresolved for months, exhorting him to demand his rights.

Eventually informed that he would have to pay rent at the market price, this decision was reversed two months before the contract was due to finish, when the hosting institution informed Basel that the family would be allowed to stay on in the flat and pay a rent of one hundred and fifty Euros – well below the market price. Unknown to Bassel, the director had been grappling with internal institutional conflicts - unable to give an answer earlier because she was patiently waiting to win over the other members of the board.

When they first arrived, Bassel’s interlocutor in the charity was Anabela with whom he communicated on a daily basis. She called in on the family in their home each morning before going to work nearby where he would seek her out later in the day, whenever he needed help. Anabela’s colleagues soon began to criticize her for being at his beck and call. Like the ISS staff, they felt he should behave like the locals and book appointments to see her. Anabela came under pressure not to be seen to “pander” towards his requests, especially since she was accumulating the role of refugee interlocutor amidst all her other duties. Anabela began to feel that her own employment was at stake.

The institution had recently had elections and the new director commented in an interview with me that they had inherited the compromise to host the family from the previous board. There was also no guarantee that the new board would agree to renew Anabela's temporary contract due to finish soon.

An interview with the previous director revealed how the hosting of the family was nested within broader institutional interests and conflicts which failed to provide institutional continuity. He intended to create laundry businesses and had a secret plan to put Bassel on a trial working period (mending the laundry that belonged to the institution) before possibly buying him his own sewing machine. But all his plans fell through when he lost the elections. The director's refusal to speak publically about the decision to host refugees, also testifies to the exercise of "contextual protection":

I was invited to talk about the refugees we were hosting, but I decided not to go. I am tired of these events; people discharge their conscience, they all feel happy and then nothing happens. I also wanted to protect the family. I didn't want to appear to be showing off a hunting trophy – we have hosted refugees, we are the best – just to calm people's consciences.

The former director had chosen Anabela as interlocutor due to her earlier experiences of working in Africa. But she had been given no training or preparation; culture and arts was her field of expertise. She found herself caught in the middle between Bassel's requests – often communicated in a state of urgent nervousness, further estranging her vigilant colleagues – and the demands of her job.

I have to deal with everything, immigration authorities ring me, the bank rings me, they ring me, the school rings, me at least if I was working in a team I could say to somebody, 'hey I don't have time to deal with this now, you deal with it', but it all just falls on me.

Anabela was aware that in the eyes of Bassel she could come across as unhelpful, when she took a long time to reply to some of his questions; but she had to consult her organization headquarters in Lisbon which was very slow to respond. Worried about what would happen in the future at the end of Bassel's contract with the charity, Anabela had to keep reminding herself that the family's future was not her individual responsibility. She was aware of the need to work towards the family's autonomy – no longer conducting morning visits - but she was also sensitive to the pressure that Bassel was under, responsible for his four children, wife and mother. Anabela was not sure how the charity would continue to support the family at the end of the contract, because she knew that the general feeling was that they were better off than many working class Portuguese people, since they had their subsidies, Bassel's salary and did not pay bills or rent. Bassel's friend in Germany, who had originally been hosted by an organization in central Portugal, reported a similar attitude in an interview conducted via Whatsapp:

They refused to give me clothes and said since I had a salary I could buy my own clothes because they were helping lots of Portuguese people whose situation was worse than mine. I am forty years old; they are forty years ahead of me living in Portugal. I have not lived here before. I need special treatment because I am new... They didn't

realize how important it was for me to save money...I thought to myself, 'if they are treating me like this now, how will they treat me in a year's time?'

One of the cleaners in the local organization told me that her colleagues had also complained that Bassel and his wife were taking Portuguese jobs. She too exercised "contextual protection" by showing her colleagues photographs of the Syrian war on the internet which she claimed silenced their complaints.

In the following section, I shall discuss how the different ways in which individuals dealt with the disappointment of undesired outcomes do not all fit neatly into a transitional analytical model from hospitality to hostility.

Dealing with Disappointment

Whilst disappointment led some of my interlocutors to develop resentment and lack of sympathy towards the plight of refugees, other reactions displayed understanding despite their personal frustration. The exercise of "contextual protection" was also a means of dealing with disappointment. A PTC employee, for example, claimed her husband was fearful of hosting people they did not know. When difficulties arose, she hid them from him. "I had to protect because if I told him everything I would have had to hear 'I told you so'. But I would do everything the same again. I don't regret anything".

Relevant here is Robbins' discussion of "the cultural construction of the good" in which he claims people's ideals should not be dismissed because "the good" in people's lives is not just perceived, but also imaginatively conceived through practices of care and empathy (Robbins 2013:457). This was evident in the reactions of some of my interlocutors.

Talking in a public event on how to manage their disillusionment when the PTC hosting team realized that the family did not want to live in Portugal, the director stated "This does not devalue our work or what we have done. We just need to lower our expectations. They are alive, they are safe and we will have the memory of how we helped them". Months later, memory was all they were left with as the family moved on to Germany⁹. Other reactions to the family's departure varied. One of the PTC employees, for example, felt that the family had been given far more opportunities than the disadvantaged groups the institution also worked with, concluding, that for her, they were not refugees; just people who had failed to make the most of what they had been offered. However, she was also aware that she was emotionally upset and had consequently decided to remain silent in any public meetings on refugee hospitality. This decision could also be interpreted as "contextual protection" – not wishing her own personal feelings to influence other people's opinions.

The flat owner, António, who had not become personally involved, was able to take a more distanced position.

I understand that Portugal is not a particularly attractive country; with its high unemployment rates and low wages, so I understand that they should want to strive for better conditions elsewhere and that Portugal should serve as a stepping stone for this.

Similar views were expressed by the priest whose parish hosted a family through PAR which only stayed six days before leaving secretly in taxis early in the morning. Claiming that he was not hurt by the family's decision his words indicate how he was still emotionally affected.

They probably didn't want to come to Portugal and somebody offered to take them to their desired destination. Imagine you thought you were going to Kazakhstan and you

end up in India and someone says if you pay me, I will take you to China... Those who worked hard to prepare their arrival they did feel hurt and felt that the family was ungrateful. I won't ask these people again to help refugees. I don't know what kind of house you live in, but this was a luxury apartment ... I was devastated when it all came to nothing ... Lots of people worked tirelessly for them. My idea was to give a virtual present to Pope Francisco who was coming to visit Portugal in May¹⁰, so he could say at least one parish has welcomed a refugee family. I don't want to receive any more refugees now. I gave everything and I won't always be here (due to my age) and I don't want to leave the responsibility for others. I dreamed to see the family happy, the children at school, we had thought of work for the father who was a carpenter.

The priest's narrative – which included an observation that the refugees did not even take the slippers which had been bought for them - provides a poignant account of how members of the local population prepared to receive the family according to their cultural imaginings of well-being (Robbins 2013). Such imaginings were also evident in the comment of another PTC employee. "Emotionally it was a disappointment. I feel as if we have failed due to reasons beyond our control; we idealized their arrival so much. We imagined the family, with the two children and thought about how we were going to help".

In his experience of helping refugees, the Syrian student Samuel felt very frustrated because he had invested a lot of time with a particular family; the children were integrating well at school, the father had a job and they had a house. He felt it was just an irrational impulse on behalf of the father that made the whole family leave Portugal.

Many of the refugees who have arrived are from a different social class and they have low levels of education. So it is hard working with them. They expect a lot 'Why don't they give me a car?' It is exhausting. Why help people if they are going to leave? I have my own life, my own things to do.

Throughout the course of the interview, it became apparent that despite his frustration, Samuel's responses oscillated between three intersecting levels. At one level, Samuel responded from a personal perspective, as a positioned individual in terms of his class and education and in these moments he expressed difficulty and at times exasperation at accepting some of the attitudes and behaviors of the refugees, many of whom were from rural areas in Syria, from a lower social class to his own. At another level, his response was less emotionally involved and more analytical; he responded as a cultural insider and as an academic able to interpret the refugees' behavior in the light of his knowledge of Syrian and Arab culture as well as in the light of his academic discipline. At this level, he displayed patience and understanding. At the third level, he positioned himself from a more strategic goal oriented practitioner perspective, exercising "cultural protection", in search of a satisfactory outcome for the refugees and the hosting institutions. It was at this level where Samuel found that he felt that he sometimes had to filter, reformulate or alter information during the translation process. Marwa adopted similar strategies which she justified as follows. "If I translate literally it will cause harm. I understand what the organization wants the refugees to understand so I try to tell them in the best possible way that will make more sense to them so that the refugees don't freak out". There were also times when Marwa and Samuel did not translate some of the Syrian's words so as not to upset the institutions.

Notwithstanding the good intentions of withholding or editing information, such practices may also be experienced as failing to provide support. Bassel often relied on the translations of a Syrian student in my home town when communicating with his host institution and was aware that his words were not translated directly. His friend in Germany,

Mohammed told me that translators act as if they are employees: if they know the information to the answer to the question posed, they answer directly. “Please don’t do this, don’t speak for him because the emotional interpretation gets lost on the way. They give dry, literal translations. If I move the person through my emotions, maybe he will help me”. We had been discussing Mohammed’s conviction that the host institution would not guarantee accommodation for Bassel at the end of the contract: yet as my discussion above has exemplified, institutions are made of and affected by individuals who can change their minds.

Conclusion

The mixed responses to experiences of solidarity and hospitality described above – sometimes within the same individual – testify to the shortcomings of the hospitality- hostility continuum as a linear analytical model for understanding the dynamics of refugee encounters. If, as I have shown above, that misunderstandings and frustrations emerge from the conflicting expectations, morals and values of the “languages of hospitality” (Frieze 2004), then this suggests that notwithstanding the importance of focusing on our common humanity and the vulnerability we all share as human beings, cultural differences cannot be ignored. Neither should they be reified. Rather, research needs to appreciate complexity and contextual specificity (Theodossopoulos 2016, Binsbergen 2003) in order to be able to “explore the different ways people organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good, and to study what it is like to live at least some of the time in light of such a project” (Robbins, 2016:457). Seen from this perspective, “contextual protection” is not just about protecting an individual or an institution; it is also about respecting and protecting alternative cultural conceptions of what is good.

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¹ The government's inter-ministerial Strategic Plan for Migration (Diário da República, 1.^a série — N.º 56 — 20 de março de 2015) included the promotion of Local Integration Plans, spearheaded by the local municipalities in collaboration with state and civil society institutions.

² Lei n.º 15/98 de 26 de Março

³ Lei n.º 26/2014, 05/05. The permit used to be renewable every two months (Lei n.º 15/98 de 26 de Março) and then every four months (Lei n.º 27/2008, de 30 de Junho) before the current period of six months <http://www.sef.pt>.

⁴ 11% of the *retornados* had a university degree, compared to 2.3% of the Portuguese; only 7% of them were illiterate, compared to 30% of the resident population (David, 2015:123).

⁵ The list is available at this link <http://www.seg-social.pt/inicio>

⁶ Vemos, ouvimos lemos. Não podemos ignorar.

⁷ Interview with PAR in Porto, 6 July 2016.

⁸ 589,17 in 2015, 618, 33 in 2016

(http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn_mw_cur&lang=en)

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in any depth the complex motivations and circumstances that led to the family's departure.

¹⁰ To visit the Catholic Sanctuary in Fátima.